



ELSAH HISTORY

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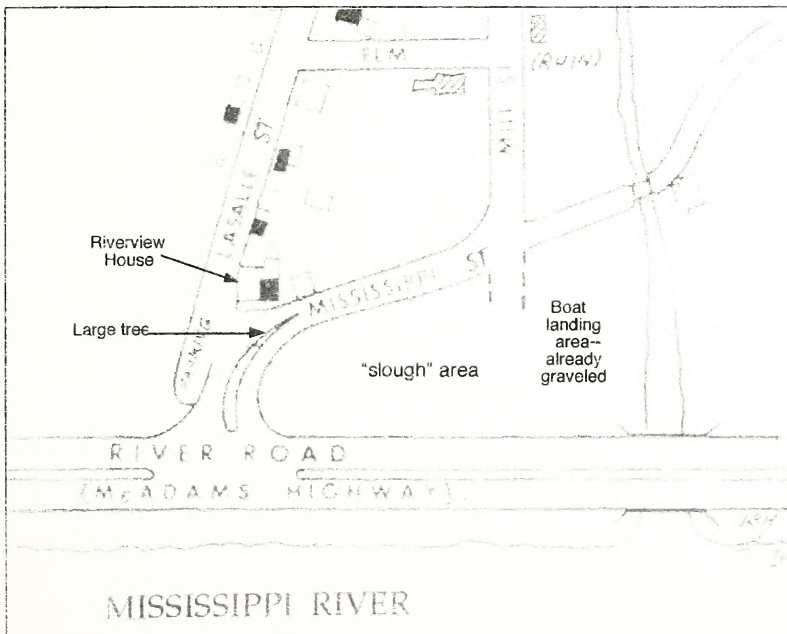
Reinvent the front of Elsah?

[The Board of Historic Elsah Foundation considered this topic to be of such importance that it was worthy of an entire newsletter. Therefore there will be three newsletters this year instead of the usual two; the third will come later this fall. The following article concerns the preservation of the nature of the village.]

A proposal is being considered by the Elsah Village Trustees, and it is 3-fold:

1. Expand the graveled area near the creek (the "slough" between the River Road and Mississippi Street) for use as a parking lot for cars and large tourist buses.
2. Install an elevated viewing platform near the phone booth/ parking area.
3. Make the median in front of Riverview House smaller, and widen the road so that cars can go directly from LaSalle Street onto Mississippi Street. This would necessitate removing the large tree in the median in front of Riverview.

The Village Board at its August meeting decided to hold a public informational meeting to get villagers' input on the issues. They announced the meeting for Tuesday evening, August 27th, and notices were posted at the usual places: the Civic Center, the Post Office, and the Principia mail room. In addition, fliers were delivered around town, house-to-house.



Map from HEF's *Elsah Guidebook*— adapted

Elsah's tour-bus parking plan peeves some

Village considers gravel lot and a river viewing deck

Public meeting on Tuesday

[*St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Alton Area Post, August 26, 2002*]

By Terry Hillig
Of the Post-Dispatch

ELSAH — Proposals to build a bus parking lot and a viewing deck overlooking the Mississippi River are causing discord among inhabitants of this old river village.

Some residents think the projects would detract from the appearance of the historic town and attract even more buses to its narrow streets. Supporters of the projects contend the additions are an accommodation to the tourism that already exists.

The Village Board will listen to comments on those two issues and a proposal to widen streets at the entrance to the village from the Great River Road (Illinois Route 100) at an informational meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Civic Center (the former school-house).

Mayor Marjorie Doerr said the proposed parking area would be to the right of the entrance from the River Road. She said gravel would be used to create a parking area for three or four buses. The area in question is low and floods frequently, but there's no

proposal to raise the elevation, the mayor said.

"We just wouldn't be able to use it in the spring with the high water," she said.

Doerr said a viewing platform three to four feet high had been proposed to reduce the number of people who dash across the highway for a view of the river. The platform would be in the parking area that's to the left of the village entrance.

Narrowing the median between the streets in and out of the village would involve the removal of a large, old tree that's dying, the mayor said. The changes would make it easier for motorists to make U-turns and get back to the highway without going farther into Elsay, she said.

"We're beginning to have more tourism," Doerr said. "We don't have any parking for buses. These streets are a very tight squeeze for buses."

Doerr said buses could park and passengers could get off and tour the village on foot.

She said the village would use money from its share of the state's motor fuel tax to pay for the projects. Doerr said she and the board wanted to hear from

village residents before they proceeded.

"Before we go too far, we want to find out if people are really interested," she said.

Ann Badasch is interested. Her restaurant, My Just Desserts, draws more visitors than any other business in the town of 635. She said a bus lot was just a matter of common sense.

"I know that when a community doesn't want buses traveling its streets, it needs to make other arrangements," she said. "Let's give people a way to enjoy Elsay on foot. That village was not built for a bus."

Bruno David moved to Elsay from New York City 2 1/2 years ago and works in the community safety department of Principia College, Elsay's major employer. He worries that the projects would alter the village's 19th-century charm.

"I don't think Elsay can handle buses," David said. He said he was concerned that the buses, once they get to town, won't remain in the lot.

"When those drivers get here, they're going to do what they want to do," he said. "My experience is

that you can have any kind of sign you want. They're not going to stay where they're told."

David said he recently saw a bus break a sidewalk and hit a house trying to negotiate a turn on a narrow street.

He said parked buses and the proposed viewing platform were bound to detract from Elsay's appearance for motorists driving by on the River Road. David said he had never seen pedestrians crossing the highway for a view of the river so he had doubts about the

need for a viewing platform.

Badasch said a bus parking lot had been discussed in Elsay for years, long before she bought the former Elsay Landing Restaurant three years ago. Badasch and her husband now live in the village.

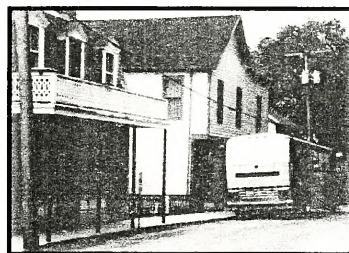
She doesn't think a parking lot would significantly change Elsay's character. She thinks officials should consider using separated concrete blocks to produce a firm base for parking without greatly altering the appearance of the area.

"I do not believe it should be blacktopped," Badasch said.

David said the proposals were intended to promote tourism but probably would have the opposite effect. He said the restaurant stood to lose business if Elsay lost its unique character.

"Maybe this will make it easier for people to come, but maybe they'll come once and see that it's not what it used to be," David said.

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A tour bus
on LaSalle Street,
May 29, 2002

Photo by J.Lewitz

Crowd, Elsay board meet

Residents weigh in on proposed bus parking plans

[*The (Alton) Telegraph*,
Aug. 28, 2002]

By Laura Pranaitis, Jerseyville bureau chief

ELSAH—A large crowd of Elsay residents and business owners let their voices be heard Tuesday night at a public hearing held to address proposed plans for bus parking, a viewing deck and shortening a me-

dian at the village's entrance.

Mayor Marjorie Doerr said the meeting was held so the Village Board could hear the opinions and ideas of the residents and business owners so the board could make a more informed decision on the projects in the future.

Among the items discussed at the meeting was a pro-

posal to place a parking area for large tour buses just to the right of the entrance off the Great River Road. Doerr said the plan for the parking lot has been proposed to alleviate the problem of buses traveling on and parking along the village's small streets.

"We're a public place, and the buses are going to be here," she said. "If we can

give them a small space, a limited space, hopefully, we would eliminate them from the streets that we don't want them on."

Mike Pittsford [sic], who is affiliated with the Green Tree Inn in Elsah, said he is in favor of the bus parking lot being installed.

"I'd rather look out at a parking lot than a field full of weeds," he said. "We can't stop the buses. The problem is that buses are coming here. This seems like a reasonable solution to address that problem."

Several residents said they were concerned about providing parking for buses because of the odor from the vehicles' exhaust systems, the increased traffic it would create and the fact that the buses will be parked in the front of the village. One resident, whose name was unavailable, said the first impression visitors would get of the village would be the buses sitting in the lot.

Trustee Lynn Schreiber was among those concerned that the buses would take away from the look of Elsah from the Great River Road if they were parked next to the village's entrance.

"I have a problem with the lot being right in the very front of our village," she said. "Buses are the way of the future, and we should

accommodate them, but I feel funny about having them in the front of the village."

Schreiber suggested trying to find a location in another part of the village for the parking lot.

Other plans discussed at the meeting included building a viewing ramp and shortening the median at Elsah's entrance to create a place for vehicles to turn left onto LaSalle Street.

Doerr said the viewing ramp would be raised about 4 feet off the ground so tourists could stand and look at the river above the traffic on the Great River Road.

"We're hoping this would eliminate people who run across the highway to see the river," she said.

Shortening the median would involve removing an old, dying tree and would make it easier for motorists to make U-turns and get back on the highway without having to go farther into the village.

Doerr said she does not have a dollar amount for the cost of the three projects, because engineering hasn't been completed yet.

"We want to see what we're going to do before we spend any money on engineering," she said, noting that at least some of

the work could be paid for out of the village's motor fuel tax fund.

Resident Bob Ruland said he wants to see a referendum on the project.

"These are major changes to (Elsah's) riverfront. We need a village referendum on this," he said.

Ruland especially was concerned about the bus parking and the effect the buses would have on the village.

"I hate buses. They're stinky and smelly, and they cause a lot of problems," he said.

Doerr said it ultimately will be the board's decision as to whether the projects are completed or not but that the board would continue to take comments from residents and business owners. She said they are welcome to send their comments to the board at P.O. Box 28, Elsah, IL 62028.

The mayor said she does not know when the board will vote on the projects but that each one will be voted on separately.

"We still have a lot of talking to do," she said.

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Public Input at the Informational Meeting

From notes taken by Jeri Lewitz

All 7 members of the Village Board of Trustees were present at the meeting: Mark Badasch, Karen Dearborn, Marjorie Doerr (Mayor), Merlin Lewis, Edward Lewitz, Robert Rockabrand, and Lynn Schreiber. At least 49 other people attended.

The Mayor explained the purpose of the meeting—to learn about a proposal before the Village Board to redevelop the front of the village. She referred to a map/drawing posted on the wall. Police Chief Larry Mead spoke on safety issues, especially with the change in median.

Many comments were made and opinions voiced. They were expressed by the Mayor or Police Chief in the introduction. Or they were various people's answers to questions. Or they arose from the audience (for or against the project).

The following list is one person's attempt to record, as much as possible, all that was said and to organize the thoughts. They are not necessarily in the order in which they were spoken.

Comments and opinions regarding the proposal in general:

- The cost would be covered by motor fuel tax funds and general funds.
- An earlier proposal to elevate Riverview House, Mississippi St., and the Corner Nest is no longer feasible because of cost.
- Principia is not ready to sell the old quarry, which some would like for bus and car parking. But it may be worth asking Principia again, and federal funds may be available.
- Many large trucks and buses go up to Principia. There are maybe 20-25 tour buses a year. Tours of the campus are scheduled beforehand, usually during weekdays, and the visitors are generally senior citizens.
- How about a rest stop for bicyclists?
- Can more trees be planted at the front of the village?
- Money should be spent first on improving the streets, the sidewalks, and other major projects around town.
- Elsah is along a scenic byway. The changes to the entrance to Elsah are major, and they would present a negative first impression for visitors.
- The project is new to the Great Rivers Land Trust, and they would like time to consider its overall effect.
- Create a drawing of the whole project—the elevated viewing ramp, the smaller median, the parking lot with a couple of buses in it—to show the impact it would have.
- There should be a referendum on these issues, for each one separately.
- The County Clerk could explain the referendum procedure.
- The Board makes the final decision on any issue, even if a referendum is held.
- A straw vote on these issues at this meeting would be hard to structure.

1) The parking lot:

- The proposal is not new; it has been around for 3 or 4 years.
- The Illinois Dept. of Transportation (IDOT) has approved the plan.
- A green space, which already exists along Mississippi St., would remain as a barrier to help mitigate bus fumes and beautify the area.
- The Village is waiting for exact measurements concerning property ownership—whether the land is IDOT's or Principia's.

- Parking in this area would keep buses from going through town, or parking along the narrow streets. Passengers could leave from the lot to walk around Elsah.
- Buses might be hidden from view of the River Road and the village.
- Locate the buses nearer the creek so they would not be so visible.
- There is room now for 2 buses in the graveled area by the creek.
- Could buses drop off people along Mill Street and then park at Principia? At Lockhaven (the Piasa Marina)? At the Grafton Visitors' Center?
- Could a place be found away from the river, on higher ground, at the other end of town?
- If a bus can fit in the small lot by the phone booth, make a separate entrance there.
- Tour bus parking is not a good idea in Elsah.
- A boat docking area would be nice instead of a parking lot for buses.
- If buses come in, can they be limited in size?
- Medium-size vans would be better than large buses.
- Sharing Elsah with a carload is better than with a busload.
- Is a sign enough to force bus drivers to shut off their engines?
- Elsah is in a confined area, being in a valley where fumes concentrate.
- Gravel would have to be replaced each year, after spring flooding.
- Buses would have to park elsewhere during high water.
- Raising the level of the lot could produce more flooding of houses along the creek.
- Senior citizens who ride the tour buses may not be able to walk from the parking lot.
- Spending a lot of tax dollars to allow buses to come into Elsah only helps the bus company and the village businesses.
- Having a parking lot for buses will increase bus traffic.
- Is the idea really necessary for the future of Elsah?

2) The viewing platform:

- The ramp would be just high enough to be above traffic on the River Road (3 to 4 feet). It would hopefully keep people from running across the River Road.
- People will still cross the road. The platform would not be attractive.

3) The median:

- With a smaller median and wider road in front of Riverview House, cars could go from LaSalle Street onto Mississippi Street (in front of the house) without having to go up to the River Road and make a U-turn, or go illegally directly onto Mississippi St.
 - If you need to turn around when going from LaSalle St. to the river, just make a U-turn in the parking lot and go back, instead of going onto Mississippi St.
 - With the proposed change, when Mississippi St. is flooded, cars coming into the village could turn left onto LaSalle St. without the possibility of a dangerous buildup of traffic on the River Road.
 - The large cottonwood tree in front of Riverview would have to be removed in order to widen the road. An arborist has said that the tree might last another 3 years, even though it is not visibly dying, and it could possibly fall onto the house or people.
 - It is not a good idea to take the tree down. The tree adds charm. Get another diagnosis on its condition.
- *****

Coming soon in another newsletter, later this fall:

- ❖ SOME OF WHAT HELEN REMEMBERS (memories by Helen Sprague)
- ❖ WORKSHOP ON HISTORIC ZONING (a summary by John Williams)
- ❖ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
- ❖ VILLAGE HAPPENINGS (Elsah Museum, New QEM Firehouse, Flash Flood on Mother's Day)
- ❖ WELCOME...
- ❖ & FAREWELL...

UPCOMING HEF ACTIVITIES - Mark your calendar.

AT FARLEY'S—"FABULOUS FRIDAY" LECTURES (\$5 donation for each):

- ❖ Oct.18th, at 7:30 pm--Charles Hosmer-tape-narrated slide show on Eliestoun (to be followed at a future time with a tour of the mansion—for HEF members only)
- ❖ Nov.1st, at 7:30 pm--Mike Rechlin, Principia Professor of Biology & Earth Science, on "Mussels of the Mississippi"
- ❖ Nov.15th, at 7:30 pm--Janis Treworgy, Principia Associate Professor of Earth Science, on "Woolly Mammoth Unearthed," the on-going dig at Principia (to be followed next spring with a tour of the dig—for HEF members only)

AT THE MUSEUM:

- ❖ Sept.28th: Story Day (featuring written memories of Elsah—Send yours in if you receive this newsletter before that date!)
- ❖ Oct.26th: Annual Bake Sale (the Museum's only fundraiser)

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Please send to: P.O. Box 117, Elsah, IL 62028
 Phone: 618-374-1059

Two views of Riverview, the large tree, the median, and the slough area --
Taken from the River Road -- September 2002

